

SELF-PRESENTATION STRATEGIES AND TACTICS IN TED-TALKS

Abstract: The article tackles the notions of self-presentation strategy and self-presentation tactics as well as offers a detailed account of self-presentation strategies and tactics employed by TED-Talk speakers. The author provides her own classification of tactics used to implement self-presentation strategy in the setting where English-language presenters deliver their speeches before the audience, pointing at the most frequent linguistic means associated with these tactics.

Key words: impression management, communication tactic, exemplification.

As of today, presentation skills are required in almost every field. Presenting yourself clearly and effectively is a key to getting your message or opinion across, and common sense suggests that a serious research into self-presentation theory combined with an appropriate case study would be of high relevance for everyone, including students majoring in linguistics.

Recently there has been a growing interest in speech self-presentation strategy, specifically in the sphere of online social media [5; 6], with authors addressing the issue of self-presentation with reference to Facebook profiles, dating sites and online resumes. Studies reveal how the quality of one's self-presentation in a CV influences recruiters' perceptions [5] or what lexical units, cultural references and spelling alterations those seeking a date rely on in order to appeal to a potential partner [6].

However, latest studies still do not provide a complete list of tactics involved into verbal self-presentation process as well as full understanding of what «strategies» and «tactics» are and how to distinguish between the two. The existing lists vary from study to study, with some tactics added and some taken off. This research aims to define a pool of self-

presentation tactics employed by speakers at TED-Talk events and put them all together into a hierarchical structure.

The topic of self-presentation as a communication strategy has been extensively studied in the last decades as closely connected with the idea of *impression management* – conscious and subconscious attempts to influence and control other people's perceptions of a person or a phenomenon during a social interaction [Goffman 1956; Jones, Pittman 1982]. In case of self-presentation, a speaker strives to influence the perception of others about him/herself.

Defining self-presentation, it is important to notice that in theory *self-presentation* is a behavior of an individual, both verbal and non-verbal, that attempts to convey some information about oneself or a certain image of oneself to other people. Motivations behind self-presentation range from self-construction and identification (for instance, constructing a positive image of oneself) to audience pleasing [3].

Self-presentation theory assumes that our behavior aims to create a desired impression. We self-present as it gives us control over how other people see us, how we see ourselves and thus facilitate smooth social interactions. Thus, self-presentation becomes an essential communication strategy, next to cooperative and non-cooperative strategies – the pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts one creates and follows in a social environment to fulfill one's intentions and achieve communication goals.

Russian linguist O. S. Issers defines *communication strategy* as «a complex of speech actions aimed at achieving a communication goal» [1]. *Communication tactics* can be defined as speech actions that facilitate implementing a particular communication strategy, so communication strategies and tactics are related to each other in the same manner «as genus vs. species» [1].

In her research on the self-presentation strategy and tactics involved in it O.S. Issers makes it clear that while strategies are mostly universal, tactics are culture-dependent and may be employed in considerable numbers.

The aim of the present research was to investigate into strategies and tactics of self-presentation employed by TED-Talk speakers. TED Talks are influential videos from renowned experts on education, business, science, technology and creativity, with subtitles in more than 100 languages.

We started with watching 25 TED-Talk videos where all the presenters, male and female, aged 30 to 50, were psychologists. We opted for speakers from this field assuming that they possess the know-how of winning the audience and presenting themselves with ease and ultimate confidence. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of the content of those talks allowed us to identify 3 strategies and 25 tactics within the overarching strategy of self-presentation as well as collect 143 utterances to use as illustrating examples. It is important to mention that the overall number of tactics we managed to identify is much larger than those we have encountered in English-language works on the issue.

With reference to several theoretical works on self-presentation, we were able to determine the following three main strategies of self-presentation: *self-presentation by self-promotion*, *self-presentation by argumentation* and *self-presentation by defense*. Each of these strategies relies upon several tactics, which you can see presented in Table 1.

Our next goal was to specify which of the tactics are used more frequently. The research indicates that TED-Talk speakers prefer to rely on *the tactic of claiming knowledge, status and power*, which involves juggling credible data about individuals, facts and phenomena (Table 1).

Table 1 – Strategies and tactics used in TED talks

Strategy	Tactics
Self-presentation by self-promotion	1) positive self-imaging; 2) aggressive self-promotion; 3) «friend-or-foe» identification; 4) distancing oneself from «others»; 5) projecting conformity; 6) reporting facts / objective information; 7) reporting personal / subjective information; 8) accentuating one's strengths; 9) accentuating one's weaknesses; 10) claiming professional competence; 11) claiming knowledge, status and power; 12) oxymoron; 13) mixing formal and informal language;
Self-presentation by argumentation	1) exemplification; 2) highlighting success; 3) highlighting progress;

		4) highlighting obstacles; 5) celebrity halo; 6) self-criticism;
Self-presentation defense	by	1) making excuses; 2) ingratiation; 3) showing regret; 4) supplication; 5) intimidation; 6) self-handicapping.

This tactic accounts for about 19% of utterances in any random sample. E.g.: *I think of all the poetry that I've read about romantic love, what sums it up best is something that is said by **Plato** over 2,000 years ago. He said, «The god of love lives in a state of need. It is a need, it is an urge, it is a homeostatic imbalance. Like hunger and thirst, it's almost impossible to stamp out».* In this particular case the speaker mentions that she has read a lot of poetry as well as cites Plato, so she can associate with ancient Greek philosophers and somewhat claim their authority.

The tactics that comes second on the frequency scale is **exemplification**, which is a type of argumentation when one provides specific examples to prove their point. Figures, charts and theoretical concepts are often exhausting for the audience, while a personal, engaging story will be much more effective at getting people's attention as something they can actually relate to. This tactic accounts for about 13% of utterances in any random sample. E.g.: *When I was seven years old and my sister was just five years old, we were playing on top of a bunk bed. I was two years older than my sister at the time – I mean, I'm two years older than her now – but at the time it meant she had to do everything that I wanted to do, and I wanted to play war.*

The tactics of **mixing formal and informal language** is on the third place, e.g.: *Well, we know exactly where it happens, in the **temporal lobe**, **right across**, **sort of** above your ear there, **in a little structure** called the **fusiform gyrus** <...> On the other hand, if you believe that the rustle in the grass is just the wind, and it **turns out** it's a dangerous **predator**, **you're lunch**. You've just won a Darwin award. You've been taken out of **the gene pool**.* In this example the speaker first relies on biology terms and then switches to rather colloquial metaphors and phrasal verbs. This tactic typically accounts for 10% of utterances in a random sample.

The fourth most frequent tactic of self-presentation is ***the tactics of reporting subjective information about oneself***. The speaker goes personal, sharing his/her feelings, values and attitudes. For instance, they say things like *I'm a professor. And I adore my students, and I adore my field*. This data is highly subjective as the audience has no way of looking into the speaker's mind to see whether he really loves his students or hates them, we have to take these words for granted. Personal information is meant to elicit an emotional response, and by appearing vulnerable and sincere speakers work their audience. This tactic accounts for 10% of utterances in a random sample.

Next on the list is ***the tactics of claiming professional competence***, e.g.: *I started studying kids and adults in all kinds of super challenging settings, and in every study my question was, who is successful here and why? My research team and I went to West Point Military Academy. We tried to predict which cadets would stay in military training and which would drop out*. The speaker covers every step of his research, emphasizes how *challenging* the conditions were as well as mentions a successful outcome. This tactic accounts for about 9% of utterances in every random sample.

The sixth tactics is ***«friend-or-foe» identification***, e.g.: *Why do we drag ourselves out of bed every morning instead of living our lives just filled with bouncing from one TED-like adventure to another?* This tactics is easily spotted on the lexical level as speakers use inclusive *we*'s and exclusive *they*'s. This tactic accounts for 8% of utterances in every random sample.

The last on the list of most frequently used tactics of self-presentation is ***the tactic of reporting objective information about oneself***, e.g.: *I'm in the field of research known as personality psychology, which is part of a larger personality science which spans the full spectrum, from neurons to narratives*. The speaker renders facts like his/her age, zodiac sign, marital status, educational background, current occupation and overall working experience. This data is objective as it can be checked in other sources. This tactics typically accounts for 5% of utterances in a random sample.

Other tactics featured in the table are rarely employed in TED-Talks, especially those that constitute defensive self-presentation, which comes to be much more relevant in political discourse, where politicians may resort

to threats to arouse fear, use flattery as a means of manipulation or get sympathy by appearing self-deprecating.

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СТРАТЕГИИ И ТАКТИКИ САМОПРЕЗЕНТАЦИИ В TED-TALKS

Аннотация: в статье представлены результаты исследования речевых стратегий и тактик самопрезентации, используемых участниками конференций в формате TED (TED-Talks). В работе описаны и разграничены понятия «стратегия самопрезентации» и «тактика самопрезентации», приведена классификация тактик, используемых для реализации данной стратегии в ситуации непосредственного выступления англоязычных говорящих перед аудиторией конференции, а также отмечены частотные языковые средства их реализации.

Ключевые слова: самопрезентация, тактика общения, экземплификация.

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